ASK AN EXPERT

How can my club develop a project that funders want to support?

Kiwanis clubs are all about making an impact on the lives of children. But most clubs can’t fund their projects alone. Use the steps below to make sure your next project impresses funders, such as corporations and foundations, who support sustainable, high-impact service.

1 **Identify the need.** Funders want to support projects that fill a need — so make sure you’ve done your research. Start by determining the community and population you want to serve. For example, you could focus on elementary students in your county. Or families who foster children in your town. Then work with this group to identify its needs. Attend community meetings, work with the PTA or survey community members in a public place. Ask questions about the challenges community members see and how your club could help.

   >> HERE’S A PRO TIP: Is an organization already working with the community or population you selected? Or were you approached by an organization seeking help? If so, work with them to assess needs. It could lead to a strong partnership!

2 **Use the need to inform your project.** Did you learn that the elementary school needs help improving reading skills? Then your club will probably start a project focused on reading. Or perhaps many families can’t afford fresh produce — so you start a community garden.

3 **Find partners.** Funders value community partnerships because they prefer organizations collaborating rather than duplicating efforts. Find other organizations addressing the need you identified — including nonprofits, schools, foundations or corporations — and approach them about partnering with your club or providing advice on your project.

   Collaboration can lead to additional resources such as funding, in-kind donations or volunteers. You’ll also engage more community members and establish new relationships.

   >> HERE’S A PRO TIP: Partner with Key Club or CKI members. Or consider partnering with your local high school or college campus, even if you don’t sponsor a Service Leadership Program there. Students are often willing to assist with writing grants, assessing the community’s needs or volunteering.
**Set goals.** As you’re developing your project, set realistic goals and consider how you’ll measure success. Upon completion of a project, funders will want an evaluation of your project’s impact, so make sure your goals are measurable and plans are in place to track your progress.

In a reading program, for instance, the club aims to improve reading proficiency for third graders over the course of the school year. To achieve this, the club should work with experts (third grade teachers) to set goals and determine how to reach them. Their specific, realistic goal may be: “At the beginning of the year, 65% of third graders have a third grade reading proficiency. Our goal: By the end of the year, 85% will have a third grade reading proficiency.”

Throughout the project, the club will work with teachers to gauge proficiency. This is how the club will measure its success and evaluate its impact — information it will share with funders.

**Plan for sustainability.** Create projects that continue throughout the year or can be repeated annually. Funders typically don’t support one-time projects — they look for a lasting impact. Your club probably feels the same way. Why put a ton of work into a project that will only have an impact once?

Your club’s ultimate goal is to end the need you identified — but that could take many years. In the meantime, the project should be sustainable.

As you work, take notes about how your project can be improved in the future. After it has been completed, meet with your members, volunteers and partners to evaluate the project. Determine how you measured up against your goals, what changes could be made, and how the project could grow in subsequent years.

With these tips, your club can approach potential funders with an impressive service project — and the confidence that it will fill an important need in your community.

*Rhobie Bentley is a program specialist with the Kiwanis Children’s Fund. She can be reached at childrensfund@kiwanis.org.*